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THE
VOICE
OF THE
WORKER

'That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . .' James Connolly

DAVID THORNLEY



THE NEW MAYOR



THE FOURTH SIEGE OF LIMERICK



FREE State Soldiers at the New Barracks Limerick July 1922.

Arabs in the saddle

INSTEAD of waiting around for orders from Jack about the small part I was to play to get the country moving again I actually sneaked away for a few weeks' holiday. I felt a bit of a heel until someone told me that with the election over there is no longer any urgency about such things as jobs for school-leavers, the 150,000 unemployed (Fianna Fail's figure in the run-up to the election), the soaring price of food and so on: the country had done the thing that mattered most — it had elected 84 Fianna Fail TDs and the Very Reverend Mick Lipper; they'd do all the moving necessary after they'd had, not three weeks', but three months' holiday with pay. Happy in the knowledge that everything was moving at home, I was able to relax and move out.

My first problem was to pay as little as possible in rail fare so that I'd have all the more to indulge my holiday taste for some gourmet food, exotic books, Macanudo cigars, the ballet, the continental cinema, and open-air orchestral concerts, etc. Now — and British pensioners living in Limerick should please note — it is no good looking to the British Rail office in Westmorland Street, Dublin, for the concessionary fare to London, other English and Scottish cities and the Channel Islands, for the obtuse, unhelpful clerks employed there never heard of the concession. I sent £6 and my pension book to the Stationmaster at Euston and promptly got back a voucher that entitles me to a year's travel from Dunlaoghaire to all those places at one-half the current fare. So I was able to book London return first-class both ways, rail and boat, for £22.65 (it is £17 odd second-class). Quite a cut down from the £60 air fare Dublin-London, which is exclusive of coach fares at either end. Any British pensioner in Limerick can do the same: travel free on his Irish voucher to Dublin and then book half-fare at Westmorland Street. That way, especially in my own case, two countries are enabled to show their gratitude for service to the community.

You'd scarcely recognise London. It's a jam-packed with tourists, spending like billio, especially the oil-rich Arabs. It is nothing for an Arab to pay £100 for a night with a girl though there has been a little trouble when a girl, turning up for such an assignation, finds that she is expected to pleasure his friends as well. The Arabs have their own kebab shops and do not seem to be interested in other aspects of western culture, so decent restaurants and theatres are not crowded. Food is a great deal cheaper, better presented and infinitely better served than in any Dublin bistro.

I saw some good-quality shirts at Knightsbridge, not by any means a cheap area, selling for £4, Pierre Balmain silk ties for £4. By the way, Gillette G11 blades were 40p for four (over 50p in Dublin. Why?). But rents and tube fares have gone soaring.

Any emigrant from Limerick — and I mean single people only — will not be able to get by in any kind of reasonable comfort for less than £90 a week before tax, that's about £63 after tax and stamp. A caretaker of a rooming house at Notting Hill Gate told me that the minimum bedsitter rent is £12; light, heat and TV rent £4; fares £3; lunches £5; shopping for breakfasts and suppers £12; laundry £2; cigarettes at 69p for 20 Players £5. And that leaves just £20 for clothes, amusements, holidays. You will note I have left drink out of this altogether; if you drink on £90 a week, you won't eat and you won't take out a girl very often — not even on the nights she is not out with an Arab.

To round this off, there are few jobs even for lads and lassies with third-level education and degrees after their names who'll command that £90 a week. Any potential emigrant, boy or girl, had better pick a live-in job and the long hours that goes with it. I hope you see now what our official encouragement of a high-birth rate leads to when there is no safety-valve of emigration. Let's not put a tooth in it: any girl-emigrant, without the highest qualifications and sometimes with them, just has to become a whore to survive. What a

BY DEANOT MCEVOY

prospect! And the TDs you elected, including the Very Reverend Mick Lipper are on a three-months' holiday! You do indeed deserve the Government you've got; not all of you of course.

OF COURSE, it is not all gloom, Unemployed men and women who run motor cars and were wise enough not to road-tax them beyond August 1 have now only to find the petrol money. It's the sort of thing I used to puzzle over when I'd hear my father on furlough from the trenches in the 1914-'18 war say, "If we had any ham we'd have ham-and-eggs if we had any eggs!" Fianna Fail will scarcely run to free petrol — at any rate not until the next election is coming near!

Then, owner-occupiers are to be relieved of rates. Out of what fund I do not know, but I do know that it is all of no help whatever to the most needy, the unfortunate payer of flat and room rent. No road tax, no rates; something has to give, someone has to pay more for something. You cannot, as any Newtonian physicist will tell you, have action without an equal and opposite reaction. I'm waiting for the reaction — in the form of an 'emergency' Budget.

En passant, I note that nine per cent of farmers are to start paying Income Tax. What about the other ninety-one per cent? O they're scot free; after all, they voted Fianna Fail and they won't be expected to pay. I also note that the Statistics Office predicts that farmers' incomes this year are to rise by at least 25 per cent. over last year: if any urban worker simply asked for a 25 per cent. rise in his wages or salary, hands would be thrown up in horror, he'd be in breach of all sorts of solemn agreements. No one says a thing when farmers collect such a bonus. Are they a special case? Supra-nationals, beloved of bishops? I think it all unjust.

ANOTHER (MINOR?) injustice to the taxpayer is the Fianna Fail Government's decision to repay several millions to the depositors who were in danger of losing their money in the crash of the Irish Trust Bank. In these columns I warned people not to put their savings in fringe banks that promised big rates of interest. These rates can be paid only on the snowball principle, that is interest is paid out of fresh deposits. When deposits dry up that's the end of the honeymoon. In the case of the ITB, large advances were made (and who knows they were not to friends of the directors?) on property that

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DAVID THORNLEY: SOCIALIST

David Thornley was probably one of the most popular individuals to have entered Dail Eireann over the past ten years. He had friends in all parties, and a disarming frankness about his lifestyle and weaknesses helped stay the Halligan hatchet when the doctor walked the Labour Party into the gory swamp of Provisionalism at the Mater Hospital and the G.P.O. The strange thing about him is that as an avowed 'man of the left' and a political scientist and historian of high calibre, he failed to clarify his philosophy and stance, for political observers at any rate, during the period in which he was a Dail deputy.

Most socialists, many with a much more sketchy understanding of the basics of their philosophy than Dr. Thornley, have not openly come out in support of the Provisionals; this does not mean that some were not, and still are, somewhat equivocal, including the 'oldest hardline' party in the country; but few of them would stand up and support the Provos publicly. And many who were ambivalent in the early seventies have seen the light through the tapestry of maimed bodies, riddled corpses and bombed buildings, so that few serious socialists are today greatly enamoured with the "freedom fighters". Indeed it is difficult for them to be so when Billy McKee, Joe Cahill, J.B. O'Hagan and Seamus Twomey spend a lot of their time combating and worrying about Gerry Adams's attempts to introduce a small dollop of socialism into the movement and in all probability offer up their morning prayers for the protection of volunteers from an 'alien ideology': the leaders of the I.R.A. are so right-wing that they would embarrass Paddy Donegan with their conservatism if for some strange reason they were to join Fine Gael.

David Thornley's sympathy for the Provos is therefore all the more surprising: admittedly, he was at pains each time he publicly intervened to state that he was not a supporter — at the Mater Hospital he was a humanitarian, at the G.P.O. a protector of civil liberties. As a humanitarian he could find a lifetime's work in poor Dublin working class districts, as a civil rights campaigner there is an ever-present campaign in the control the rich and powerful exercise over all the media — newspapers, radio and television — a power that enables them to maintain the status quo and muzzle serious investigation and revelation. The "Sunday World" will expose the owner of a massage parlour, will it reveal the financial empire of Charlie Haughey? Dr. Thornley seemed to become erratically concerned about the rights and liberties of the kneecappers whose humanitarianism is a subject of public record.

Over a period of eight years David Thornley's occasional bedding with the Provos and his unpredictable public pronouncements became too much for the party leadership. It was not personal: Cosgrave, whom he had called an 'idiot' after the contraception vote, visited him in hospital; it was politic. Michael Mullen junior, was sent in to lift his Dail seat, with Pat Carroll rooting for himself, in a three cornered

was overvalued. Why should the taxpayer — that's you and me — pay for speculation? Neither Dr. Newman nor his political mouthpiece has said anything about this. Christ whipped usurers out of the temple: Fianna Fail and Mick Lipper compensate them. I see that Barry Desmond T.D. is at least alert during the long holiday and proposes to raise this hand-out with the appropriate crook-in-office when the Dail reassembles. I repeat it is precisely misuse of the taxpayers' money amounting to common theft to dish cash out to people who are nothing more than victims of their own greed. Not a whimper either from that Fine Gael stalwart, Tom O'Donnell.

FOR THE benefit of our third-level scholars at Limerick National Institute of Higher Education some garffiti noticed in

REPUBLICAN

BY JOHN CASEY

general election scramble. In keeping with the general shambles of Labour in Dublin the seat was lost to the party.

Dr. Thornley wrote two articles after his defeat: in the "Irish Times", in typical sporting fashion, he had a good word for almost everyone, excepting Halligan; even young Mullen who had inserted a personal advertisement in the paper on polling day was not called to task for his mean little ploy; and, in comparing himself to Hamlet and admitting neglect in his constituency work, seemed to accept that defeat rested on his own head.

A second article that appeared in "Hibernia" is more interesting. Garret FitzGerald is claimed as a man of 'the Left', something that will amuse no one more than Garret for it was he that led the Coalitionists in '73 in assuring representatives of Irish capital that their interests would be secure under a Coalition. Of course it has become respectable in Dublin to be left — everyone is "left". There are revolutions in the "in"pubs around closing time most weekends and at election times some of the "revolutionaries" vote Fianna Fail. Other than West Limerick, Clare and districts in the West of Ireland where Fianna Fail is a political expression of Roman Catholicism, Dublin is the strongest, politically solid, bastion of Fianna Fail in the country. Anyway Garret is "Left".

In the article David Thornley hoists his political flag, 'socialist — republican', and calls for a united alliance of Labour, Sinn Fein and the Communists. Once again he seems to be somewhat out of touch: about a year and a half ago a meeting of these three took place in the Mansion House at which Eamonn Smullen of Sinn Fein assured the large gathering that his party being the party of the Left weren't dependant on any group for support, and promptly scuttled the Left Alternative, as it was called. The republicans have always been the Lord's anointed and have been waiting for sixty years to inherit the kingdom.

David Thornley became a devotee of the same musty shrine of republicanism, an eighteenth century political philosophy which has a place in history books but not in the bread and butter politics of the seventies. Dr. Thornley is a distinguished academic and was a highly successful television interviewer. He was not so successful in politics: he couldn't cope with the pressures of being a practising politician in Ireland. We wish him well on his return to the cobbled cloisters of Trinity College. Let us hope he has learned something from the past eight years and that he can yet make a contribution to socialism.

London: Lunacy drools O.K., Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle Rules perhaps O.K. and Absolute Zero Rules O.K.

FINALLY, a personal note of thanks to that grand Kerryman, Donal O'Sullivan, who took me from Limerick station on a round trip to West Clare at a most reasonable fee. It was my intention that day to buy a little grey home in the West but Donal, in his wisdom, told me that he would have used physical force to stop me bidding for a waterless hermitage at the back of beyond, I'd in mind. As reward, I'm going to introduce him to an Arab! Meanwhile, get the country moving again!

**PART
28**

**BY
P.J. RYAN**

THE STATERS DRIVE SOUTH

In their drive to the South, the Staters made for all railway towns; they ignored villages and hamlets. Groups of Diehards in some towns and villages were unaware that they had been bypassed and exercised the functions of government. They collected money for their maintenance in a manner that was vexatious and insolent.

As the Staters consolidated their positions in the towns by taking on recruits and protecting supply lines for fairs and markets, they found leisure to send patrols into the nearest villages. The coming of the Staters to the villages was seen by the occupying Diehards who took evasive action or retired to the hillsides. The evasive action consisted in remaining in the villages as 'locals', pretending no interest in the cares of combat. The presence of those 'locals' constituted a continuing threat to the lives of any villagers who showed unseemly pleasure in the presence of the Staters. Should the patrol remain in the village for several hours or search for arms, the presence of those subversive men was quickly discovered; they were taken into protective custody to save them from the violence of the villagers and forwarded for internment.

Those who had fled to the hills formed roving bands or flying columns of from ten to thirty men. They built dug-out holes in the earth in which they stored gelignite and other explosives which they had removed from evacuated British barracks. They billeted themselves in turn in the houses in the surrounding countryside. When food supplies became scarce, they made a raid or sortie on some town or village and secured such supplies as they needed. They removed the booty in commandeered cars if they had come on foot, and in their own cars if they had come by car. When retiring after a raid they cut down a tree or blasted a culvert or bridge to delay pursuit. When feasible they ambushed any patrol of Staters who might foolishly follow in pursuit.

Those men who had fled to the hills and continued their resistance against the State must be credited with sincerity in their belief that their actions could lead to the establishment of a United Irish Republic.

Those men of the hills were deceived and misled by alien imposters. They risked, and some of them lost, their lives in their innocent belief in falsehood and deceit, while their deceivers lived in luxury.

Such is the tragedy of the Westernmost island of Europe. Any alien adventurer can enter this little country and posing and mouthing as a patriot, feed on the meat which braver hearts had earned. The activities of those roving bands of Irregulars, Republicans or Diehards, could only be countered by sending out patrols as decoys to be shot at like sitting ducks.

Once or twice each week in September and October, a patrol of twenty men left the New Barracks in two Lancia tenders. The patrol usually reported at Tipperary town and from there they ranged far and wide from the Galtees to the Knockmealdown mountains. They were sent out as bait to be shot at and by driving slowly to invite an attack. An armour car always went with the patrol, remaining about two miles in the rear and racing forward into action should the patrol be attacked.

AN AMBUSCADE

Occasionally the patrol set up an ambush, arriving at some place at night and remaining concealed until ten next morning. Those ambushes were set up in the knowledge that an opposing column of Diehards were operating in the area, either on foot or in cars.

On one such ambush, fifteen men lay concealed behind an

The Fourth Siege of Limerick

earthen bank bounding a mountain car track which, at an angle, covered a mountain road below them. The road below emerged from between a cut in the mountain and was bounded by swampy ground. Where the car track and the road joined, the armour car was concealed behind a blacksmith's forge. The car was covered with furze bushes and could not be seen. From the ambushers point of view the set up was ideal but anyone unfortunate to be caught in the trap would consider it to be most unpleasant.

The fifteen men lying in ambush were thirty feet apart. As they waited a tall young curate came slowly up the car track, reading his breviary in the early morning light. His slow pace and unconcern was an unwitting asset to the ambush as none would believe that he would wittingly assist the ambushers. This thought may have occurred to the curate as, having passed the last and highest man, he turned around in fury, calling out, "Murderers, you are out to kill", and then went quickly on his way.

One fiery young Stater lower down the line, on being informed of the curate's message, made to race after the curate with the stated intention of shooting him dead. He was restrained from his rash intent; he then pleaded that he would only shoot the curate in the legs. It was pointed out to the man that forbearance and prudence were requisite as, to shoot the curate, even in the legs, would spoil the ambush. The noise of the shot would alarm the countryside. It was stressed to the man that it was better to wait until the ambush was over and then, if still alive, he could shoot the curate anywhere he liked. Only curates are up at dawn to hear the lark in the clear air greeting the rising sun. Parish priests and canons minor are irregular and arise much later.

Having completed a three days tour of the Galtee and the Knockmealdown range of mountains, the patrol reported back to Tipperary town and rested for a few hours before returning to Limerick.

A party of Diehards learned that the patrol would be returning to Limerick around eight a.m. and decided to give them a hearty send off. They prepared a hole in the ground opposite the gate of the nuns' convent in Tipperary town. Into this hole they were placing a landmine, with the patriotic intention of blasting the armour car and the Staters into celestial orbit.

While they were engaged in this happy task, the local parish priest came upon the scene. Calling them murderers he ordered them to take themselves and their mine elsewhere as the explosion would terrify the nuns and possibly injure some of them. He was ordered at gunpoint to take himself off and to keep himself and his religion out of practical politics. He was further informed that religion and politics do not mix except at diplomatic level. His reverence moved off, possibly musing on the strange ways of patriots, and had gone a hundred yards and rounded a corner when he was lifted off his feet and thrown to the ground by the blast of the exploding land mine. The patriots had blasted themselves into pieces with their own land mine. The local garrison cordoned off the area and within an hour had made the place presentable again.

The noise of the explosion woke the Limerick patrol from their rest. They viewed the scene and getting into their two tenders they, with the armour car, returned to Limerick. One man expressed the opinion of all saying, "There's too much

UNEMPLOYMENT

The official unemployment figure stands at 112,000. It is well known that the true figure is nearer 160,000. The Coalition Government showed contempt for the Irish working people in their response to this situation. They boasted at the time of their January budget that their increased investment in building and construction would create jobs. This was a cheap lie! Their investment in building and construction in 1976 was £180m. The investment this year will be £200m. When allowance is made for at least 13% inflation this is not an increase in investment but a real decrease. In other words, the Coalition Government when they went out of office had made less real investment in the building industry this year than last year! This was clear evidence first of their total dishonesty and more importantly of their complete lack of concern about the 160,000 people who are unemployed and their families.

The very small increase in the number of jobs available now is no thanks to the Coalition. Firstly it is the normal pattern that employment increases during the summer months. The Fianna Fail Government is, of course, not above claiming credit for this. Secondly, whatever job opportunities are available are due to the wage restraint of Irish workers in recent years. This more than anything either the Government or the bosses have done is responsible for the few job opportunities available. Workers must reject the lies of the Coalition and Fianna Fail. This can only be done by electing representatives who are not afraid to fight day after day against the parties of the rich.

Figures: Public Capital Programme 1977.

EMIGRATION STARTS AGAIN!

There is strong evidence that emigration from Ireland has started again. In 1975 there was a net inflow of 4,400 people into Ireland. In 1976 there was a net outflow of 6,900. This turnabout of 11,000 people is larger than the change in any other two years in the recent past. This fact made the claims of

patriotism going on here, let's head for home". From those two incidents and many other somewhat similar ones, it can be seen that Staters and Diehards alike cared not a damn about religious beliefs. Religious beliefs could not sway either party from their divinely appointed mission of mutual slaughter; their outlook was totally pagan.

HOW HOME RULE BECAME ROME

This happy and blessed state of paganism was repugnant to the Roman Catholic hierarchy. When the issue of the Civil War seemed to be no longer in doubt, out of nowhere a chaplain to the Forces appeared in the New Barracks. He was dressed in the uniform of an officer, with a white collar showing at the neck. He held the rank and pay of a captain. His pay was twelve shillings and sixpence per day, or four pounds, seven shillings and sixpence per week.

As the unhappy man never had more than seven shillings to rattle in his pocket, it was learned that the balance of his pay was surrendered to his ecclesiastical superiors.

The Cardinal Primate of Ireland now had his red slippered foot on the necks of the army. Religion and politics had united at diplomatic level. The church had staked a claim to a bonanza richer than the gold mines of Avoca. With the appointment of a chaplain to the Forces compulsory attendance at religious ceremonial parades soon followed. The thousands of citizens who had lapsed from formal religious practices soon got the message and were brought to their knees again. They would pay their 'dues' and give servile obedience to the dictates of their clergy.

the Coalition ring very hollow indeed. Workers did not accept the Coalition argument that emigration ended while they were in Government. It ended but it also started again! It is of no interest to emigrants and their families to see Fianna Fail and the Coalition blaming one another for this situation. The reality of emigration remains; there will be more next year and more still the year after. Neither the new Fianna Fail Government nor the Coalition has the will or the courage to take the unemployment problem seriously. It will only be dealt with when those who suffer from unemployment and emigration have political representatives who are courageous and dedicated.

Note: the figures above are Central Statistics Office figures of "Net Passenger Movements".

FIANNA FAIL'S PROMISES

The Coalition Government was a disaster as far as workers are concerned. Their solution to the crisis was the solution which the employers and property owners wanted. As usual the working people paid the price. What attitude should workers and their families take to Fianna Fail's promises?

Fianna Fail in their election manifesto want pay rises of 5% combined with tax cuts. Inflation will be at least 13% again during this year 1977. Therefore, if workers' living standards are to remain only the same, the tax cuts will have to be worth 8% of their wages. For a married man with two children on £40 per week this would mean he will be charged no tax at all. A married man with two children on £60 would have to have his tax bill reduced by 70% to keep his standard of living the same as it is now.

A married man with two children on £80 would have to have his tax bill reduced by 50% to maintain his standard of living. In short, to maintain living standards with only a 5% pay rise, Fianna Fail will have to almost abolish income tax on most workers. Of course this is not what Fianna Fail have in mind. There is nothing about maintaining people's living standards in the Fianna Fail manifesto. If they do what they say they will do (which is unlikely) your standard of living will fall! If the tax cuts were large enough to maintain your standard of living then you can expect massive reductions in expenditure on social welfare, housing, health and education. Either way you lose!

The Emancipation Act of 1829 granted a measure of freedom and tolerance to Catholic, to Presbyterian, and to other proscribed religions. Under this Act the British government held the power of veto to the appointment of Catholic bishops, abbots and parish priests. The Act was operated in this manner: When a curate was selected for appointment as a parish priest, he was vetted by the local R.I.C. for his political beliefs. All information was passed on to Dublin Castle and to Whitehall, London. The views of the British government were then passed on to the British Ambassador at the Vatican in Rome. The Roman Catholic Pontiff then permitted or rejected the appointment on the advice of the ambassador. On this account only law-abiding servile men could secure ecclesiastical preferment.

With the establishment of the Irish Free State this power of veto was lost to the British government. For over a thousand years the monks had promised the Faithful heavenly bliss in a world to come, while they enjoyed heaven on earth in this world with the possibility of even better things to come. With the removal of the veto, the monks were in their element: they now could give free rein to their ambitions. The many orders of monks and other religious orders infesting the city and country could now acquire the many mansions and broad acres of the departed British gentry and indulge their avarice in commercial activities in the sacred name of religion. The country was now back to square one before all the troubles started, a nation enslaved by religion.

Home rule was Rome rule!

(To be continued).

THE NEW MAYOR

In another country and in another age Frank Prendergast might have been a lay preacher; he has all the qualities it takes for that role: a good speaking voice, enough acting skill to match the average "ham" actor, and a stock-in-trade of pious exhortations designed to appeal to our higher, better natures. But in Ireland the power and numbers of the professional preachers leave little room for lay preachers in the religious field, so Frank Prendergast has been forced to spread his talents over a wider area.

At school Prendergast was an intelligent and hard-working pupil. He developed an early interest in the Irish language and has continued to study and speak it ever since. He also developed a strong puritanical streak at this time, nurtured by his formative home and school experiences. This streak has continued to surface in his personality and his politics to this day.

He left school to become an apprentice baker, a trade followed by his father and grandfather before him. He joined the bakers' trade union and soon found a ready-made outlet for his enthusiasm and aspirations. In the late forties and early fifties there were few opportunities for working class boys in Limerick and not every baker's son was allowed to follow his father's trade. The seventeen-year-old Killalee boy was one of the chosen few.

Frank Prendergast quickly steeped himself in the history of the struggles of his fellow-bakers and of the trade union movement in general. After the completion of his apprenticeship, he became secretary of the Limerick Branch of the bakers' trade union. Soon he was involved in meetings and negotiations with the local employers. A great deal of bitterness existed between the Limerick bakers and their bosses and sometimes even among the bakery workers themselves. Frank Prendergast has many interesting and hair-raising stories to relate about his clashes with the Russell family and with Vincent Feeney, the present president of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce, though nowadays he (Prendergast) does not consider it politic to tell many of these tales in public.

For fifteen years Frank Prendergast served on the national

executive of his union and went on to become national president. Here he came under the influence of John Swift, the long-time and left wing general secretary of the union. Prendergast and Swift got on fairly well together, though the Limerickman, because of his strong religious convictions, was considered to be conservative on many issues. In 1972 Frank Prendergast became president of the Limerick Council of Trade Unions and was now one of the most capable and experienced union men in the city. On the following year he left his part-time position in the bakers' union to join the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union as its full-time secretary of the Shannon Branch. He had been a good official for the bakers and was generally liked by his fellow workers at Keane's Bakery.

Through his national trade union involvement he had become a member of the Labour Party in the early sixties, though he was never a political activist in Limerick, confining himself largely to his union duties. He stood as a Labour candidate in the 1974 local elections and, with the help of his wife's energetic campaigning was narrowly elected to the fourth and last seat in Ward 1. Through the Coalition majority on the City Council, it appeared likely that Prendergast would become Mayor in the life of the Council, especially if he played his political cards carefully.

Given his undoubted abilities, his debating skill and his long record in the labour movement, Frank Prendergast has not been one of the most impressive or leading councillors. He has at all times been content to support Labour's Coalitionist policies and to play a subservient role to Steve Coughlan. But Prendergast was compromised from the very night of his election to the City Council and his role as a councillor was already clearly predetermined by his Coalition Colleagues.

Under a headline, "Politics No Bed of Roses", the *Limerick Weekly Echo*, in its edition of July 16th, 1974, reported on a reception held in the Shannon RFC Pavilion to celebrate the election of Prendergast. One of the most prominent guest speakers at the affair was the Fine Gael Senator, G.E. Russell, the erstwhile opponent of Prendergast from his days as a baker. This time, however, Russell sang a different tune.

TAXATION OF FARMERS

Last year P.A.Y.E. Taxpayers paid £370m. in income tax. Farmers paid £4m. If farmers had paid the same proportion of their personal income in tax as workers did they would have paid between £50m. and £75m. The Coalition boasted in its election manifesto that "farm incomes this year are estimated to rise by at least 30% above last year's level". The 1977 National Wage Agreement implies a fall in the living standards of workers. In this situation the political representatives of workers must insist that farmers pay their fair share of the tax burden. But when is this demand going to be seriously made at national and local level?

When allowance is made for inflation, Government expenditure on Health, social welfare, education and housing are all lower in 1977 than in 1976. No wonder the Coalition Government could give tax cuts to companies and those on high incomes in their January budget. There services which form a vital part of the living standards of workers and the unemployed cannot be maintained at even their present inadequate level without taxing farmers. The inflation that is reducing the real incomes of workers consists largely in price increases for farmers. On top of which farmers have guaranteed markets for the produce through the EEC. Workers have no such guarantees of employment. The political spokesmen of workers have been weak and cowardly compared to the many politicians who represent farmers. The

Labour Party have failed miserably to make its voice heard in the interests of P.A.Y.E. taxpayers.

Farmers argue that taxation will reduce incentive and investment in agriculture. Both farmers and their many political representatives have pretended that agriculture is a dynamic growing sector of the Irish economy. In fact nothing of the sort is true. They have achieved high growth rates and high incomes in recent years simply because of high prices, fixed by the EEC. Productivity on many Irish farms is static or declining. The history of Irish farming is a history of wasted resources and low output. If farmers paid income tax equivalent to that of workers, it would encourage them to invest and improve their farms and modernise their production methods. Irish farmers and their politicians have protected themselves from the demands of a modern society by saying that agriculture must have a special privileged place in Irish society.

It is true that Irish agriculture has tremendous potential. It is untrue that Irish farmers are realising this potential. It is now time for workers to point to the potential of Irish agriculture. Workers should not be slow to insist that the land be used in the best possible way for social progress. A fair income tax system is the first step in making agriculture play the social role it is capable of.

AN ANSWER TO VANDALISM?

by JOHN CASEY

Vandalism is today at a peak in these islands unknown in any period of peacetime. In Britain some football matches have become a nightmare for police and city officials, as gangs gut stadiums, streets and themselves in senseless and, to the general public, totally incomprehensible rampages of destruction and violence. In housing estates here and in England old people are terrorised, windows, roofs, walls are destroyed, owners of little huckster shops are robbed and beaten. The walls of railway stations, public buildings and houses are covered with the meaningless and unimaginative graffiti of the vandals.

The sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists have been busy explaining the reasons why the breaking up of settled communities and their dispersal, the anonymity and characterlessness of new housing estates, the lack of recreational and entertainment facilities in the new complexes, a blindness to, and ignorance of basic human requirements amongst planners, architects, builders and civil servants. As the experts threw up each new idea, the authorities tried it out in a Canutish attempt to stem the rising tide of vandalism. Children were persuaded to set trees in their estates in the belief that they would not destroy what they had planted. They did just that.

The current theories of the British experts are: (1) that the vandals are the offspring of the war children, seed of the blitz trauma, victims of the scars of the parents: (2) that the children, many of them boys and girls not even in their teens, are responding to the official vandalism of the authorities who destroy blocks of houses and run highways past doorways ignoring the feelings and wishes of the residents

That's the current expert thinking but it is little consolation to the frightened old people, the terrorised mothers, the vandalised buildings. In Ireland the answer is police to saturation point, tougher sentences and an extended juvenile prison system which will graduate more adult criminals in the best tradition of prisons. The manipulators of the system, our glorious flea-sized free enterprise system, blithely ignore that vandals are the army of the hopeless: hopeless in their poverty, their mental deprivation, hopeless in the loneliness and unhappiness of being outsiders, peeping from grimy streets at the riches of the office blocks, the opulence of the people in tree-lined and landscaped suburbia. They are not fools: they see Belton's pubs and Rogers' betting shops and the golden balls of the pawnbroker (punners will be punished!) and they know that they get official blessing to leech and lawfully rob the neighbourhood.

Crime pays excellently if you commit crime inside and within the laws of the system. Bankrupts seldom go to jail, bankrobbers always, if they're caught. Slum children are not born into the aristocracy of crime, those who build and destroy with a signature; they are the lumpen-proletariat of crime, born to the bicycle chain not the biro. And a slum is a state of mind as well as a place.

But who, brother, is going to set the system up for criticism because of a few vandals and, anyway, given every chance wouldn't they go wrong? Of course they would; they're lazy, dirty, criminally inclined, wasters, ne'er do-goods, bad breeding, you know. Breeding will out. Set it to music, darling, while I cook the sirloin.

"Politics is not always a bed of roses, but it is men like Frank Prendergast who survive", he said. Other speakers included Ald. P. Kennedy (Fine Gael) and Steve Coughlan.

So the stage was set and Prendergast accepted and played out his role for what it was worth. The only prize on offer was the Mayoralty and this post greatly appealed to Frank Prendergast's sense of history. For three years on the Council he sat tight and bided his time. Even when Steve Coughlan pushed his son Thady into the Mayor's seat before Prendergast in 1975 he did not rock the boat, being content to accept a written guarantee from Coughlan that he (Prendergast) would be the first citizen in 1977.

Though hampered because of his heavy workload as a union official, Prendergast has not realised his political potential. His old tendency to preach at people, his plaintive appeals to those supposedly nobler instincts, his almost apologetic attitude to the City Manager in asking questions and, above all, his desire to be accepted as a "responsible" public representative are the main reasons for this situation. It is unlikely that he will try to make any radical changes as Mayor and it seems certain that he will accept the official line of the City Hall bureaucracy without too much strain on his political ideology.

It will be interesting, however, to see how the close relationship between the Mayor and the local clergy will manifest itself over the next year. In recent times Prendergast has appeared to be the Jesuits' favourite son in the Limerick labour movement. His selection for a three weeks, all expenses paid, trip to Russia with Father T. Morrissey, to study education in the Soviet Union is but one example. The Mayor has also worked closely with the Jesuits at the Crescent Comprehensive School, at which he is the chairman of the board of management. He was also rewarded for his support of

the Coalition Government by a place on its board of governors.

Like Brendan Corish, the Mayor is a Catholic first and a politician afterwards. His total allegiance to the Church has caused him to oppose the legalisation of family planning as a basic civil and human right. In 1972 when the Provos bombing and shooting campaign was riding high, he spoke repeatedly about the inevitability of a united Ireland. It is not clear if he has now shifted from this attitude.

But Ted Russell's prediction that "Frank Prendergast will survive" came to mind again on two recent occasions. Before the Mayoral election after Lipper and Leddin had split with the Labour Party, Prendergast stayed with the party and thus ensured the support of the two Coughlans. During the general election count, he referred to Lipper's supporters as "a Paisleyite element in Garryowen". However, after the general election, one of the first decisions of the new Mayor was to appoint Lipper as Deputy Mayor for two weeks while he (Prendergast) was on holidays. That this appointment coincided with the Garryowen Festival was a happy coincidence. In making this decision Prendergast bypassed the two members of his own party, the two Coughlans, who has ensured his election as Mayor. But by this time, of course, Steve Coughlan had been defeated and had been turned down by the Labour Party for the Senate stakes.

Apart from one proposal to nationalise the banks, Frank Prendergast has not attempted to change anything in Limerick or Irish politics. He was a total and unqualified supporter of the Coalition Government. In a changed Labour party he could, perhaps, play a more progressive role. He will be a scholarly and hard-working Mayor but his election will do nothing to advance the cause of Irish socialism.

INTERVIEW

The following is the text of an interview for "The Irish Rosary" between Eoin Mac Shamus, chief biblical reader of R.T.E. and Liam Crossgrain, a former Taoiseach. For obvious reasons it was never published.

Mac Shamus: Mr. C. you have a reputation of being taciturn and gruff. Is this correct or are you a believer in the old Gaelic seanfhocal, "Is binn e beal ina thost"?

Crossgrain: No, I talk to Vera and to Paddy Donegan about the horses. I don't understand the foreign stuff you're speaking.

MacShamus: Oh, I understand that, it's just that I'm so fluent in the old language that it flows out of me and don't you worry about the talking. I enjoy talking.

Crossgrain: You seem to have done well.

MacShamus: How did you take the 'thundering disgrace' speech, as it is popularly known in the media?

Crossgrain: I didn't take it. It wasn't directed at me. That was a speech Paddy aimed at that baldly little man with the foreign name.

Mac Shamus: Do you believe that religion and politics go hand in hand in the South. Do you in fact, read the Bible?

Crossgrain: Sure, all the people in Ireland except Cruise O'Brien and a few beardy fellas in Trinity College, are Catholic. No; I don't read the Bible, it's the other crowd that read that. I saw wan of them though. Big thick book isn't it?

MacShamus: Indeed so. But surely with the ecumenical movement — you know I was one of the greatest ecumenists in the country when it started. I don't bother much with it now; I took up ornithology.

Crossgrain: I never heard of that movement; I hope it's not one of those illegal groups. You're not in one of those illegal organisations yourself, are you? You look like that Mexican Pancho whatever his name is with the droopy moustache. But if you've taken up knitting you're alright. Vera's always knitting — patches on my riding-britches, mending Mary's knickers. Children are fierce hard on clothes.

MacShamus: Yes. Well, I see you're a real individualist. What was your greatest achievement in public life?

Crossgrain: Resigning as Taoiseach. You must be mixing me up with someone else. Sure I never did nothing publicly or privately except riding with the South Dublin Hunt. Did you ever ride to the hounds yourself now?

MacShamus: Yes, certainly I went out with the Galway Blazers. But you are so charming that you ask more questions than I do and I'm forced to answer. Why did you vote against the government bill on contraception?

Crossgrain: Yes, well it's time the record on that was set straight. Vera called in to Sister Assumpta Concepta Magnificat the head nun in the Flying Sisters convent in Dunleary and home she comes to me. "So we've been in single beds and taking cold showers all our lives and now you're going to flood the market with pills and condoms and Dutch caps. By God, if you do you can sleep in the stable with the ould horse; you'll not get into my bed again". Now, I don't mind the horse but you couldn't sleep with her, lashing out in her sleep. I tried out the stall and she ate my moustache; they're mad for straw. Anyway, Vera comes before the horse. That's why I voted.

MacShamus: Well Mr. C., so it was a personal or semi-personal or whatever-you-may-call it decision. And to what now do you attribute the defeat of your government?

Crossgrain: Coalition with that Labour crowd, it was a bad day for us. Trying to give the lower orders notions; weren't they happy in the past when they knew their station. It's all this socialism that's being preached, putting ideas into their

heads. I hope you're not one of them? No. It's easy to spot them, they're always going about in leather jackets and beards and fancy shirts. Never wash themselves.

MacShamus: Well how do you reconcile that with being a Matt Talbot man. I'm a Matt Talbot supporter myself; it was I rehabilitated him from scabery; Cardinal Allibrandi told me that he'd never have been canonized, the Pope said, if it weren't for the groundwork I'd done.

Crossgrain: I never knew he suffered from scabies. Shows what a holy man he was, never compalined. But to answer your question, sure the man was a saint he'd have nothing to do, no truck with subversives, if that's what you mean. Now, take that Labour crowd: Brendan and Jimmy are alright but the supporters of that party would steal the horse from under you, And always abusing the Blueshirts; sure, if it weren't for them where would Fine Gael be?. Tell me, Eoin, I've been watching you. Would you consider going into politics? Garret is recruiting; he'd be delighted with a blatherskite like yourself. You might become the Minister for Gaelic, O'Donnell's job, someone told me O'Donnell could speak it.

MacShamus: Well, I am most flattered but I must refuse your kind offer. I find religion most satisfying and rewarding if I may say so and the gift of the gab is never lost; jabbered my way to fame. Well Taoiseach, you're a hard man to interview; I know now why you're called the silent mole. But we'd better finish up. Could I have a ball of malt from that fine decanter in your cocktail cabinet?

STREET SCENE

JOHN CASEY

I was driving through the slums of one of our cities the other evening (Notice how people always drive through the slums?). Ever hear anyone say: "I went for a stroll in the slums last night. Exquisite walk, the air fetid with the smell of poverty, dirt and decay."

The seat was placed in a strange place, slightly recessed on the footpath of a seedy potholed street, facing two pubs frequented by dockers and other people of the district. The habitués of the pubs were unlikely to use the seat as they carry proudly and erect a reputation for hard drinking, and for being able to carry their drink.

Nor were any of them sitting on the seat. An old handsome man with a rich grey beard and a permanent smile, and a handsome boy about eight or nine sat there.

As I passed, the old man put down a bottle, laughing and chatting to the child, and the kid handed him another large bottle which the old man raised to his head in a movement of love. The boy looked on in wonder, his hand on the old man's knee. The man lowered the bottle and chuckled a friendly remark to the gaping look of wonder. The man is a member of the Simon Community, a cider drinker. The little boy was a young negro.

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